

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1291

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 8819

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, CI

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ACTS AGAINST UNION CRITICS - COPPER CONFEDERATION

REF: SANTIAGO 7617

1. SUMMARY: THE GOC TOOK STRONG ACTION AGAINST ITS CRITICS IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT SEPTEMBER 6 BY DISMISSING ALL BUT ONE OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE COPPER WORKERS CONFEDERATION (CTC) AND REPLACING THEM WITH LABOR LEADERS OF ITS OWN CHOOSING. WE BELIEVE THIS ACTION IS THE BEGINNING OF A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TO CUT BACK THE UNION LEADERS (THE "DINAMICOS") WHO HAVE ORGANIZED THEMSELVES BETTER TO PRESENT LABOR DEMANDS TO THE GOVERNMENT (REFTEL). END SUMMARY.

2. THE MINISTER OF LABOR SEPTEMBER 6 DISMISSED FIVE OF THE SIX MEMBERS OF THE CTC EXECUTIVE BOARD AND NAMED EIGHT OTHER UNION LEADERS TO THE BOARD. CTC PRESIDENT GUILLERMO SANTANA -- A LEADER IN THE " DINMICO" GROUP -- WAS AMONG THOSE DISMISSED. THE NEW BOARD IMMEDIATELY MET TO NAME AS NEW CTC PRESIDENT BERNADINO CASTILLO, AN OLDER COPPER UNION LEADER IN A SENIOR UNION POSITION AT ANTOFAGASTA. CASTILLO HAS INDICATED CLEARLY THAT HE WOULD NOT JOIN WITH THE INDEPENDENT "DINAMICOS" BUT IS PARTICIPATING WITH THE PRO-GOVERNMENT LABOR FRONT ("FRENTE LABORAL") IN THE SEPTEMBER 11 ANNIVERSARY PARADE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS THUS PURGED THE LEADERSHIP OF ONE OF THE "DINAMICOS" STRONGEST UNIONS.

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3. THE EXPELLED CTC BOARD MADE A STATEMENT CHALLENGING THE GOC ACTION AND ASSERTING THAT THE BOARD WOULD TEKE ALL ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGAL ACTION POSSIBLE TO DEFEND ITS INTERESTS. THE "DINAMICOS" ARE MEETING TO SEE WHAT SUPPORT THEY CAN GIVE TO CTC. ANTONIO MIMIZA, PRESIDENT OF THE PETROLEUM WORKERS, HAS ALREADY SPOKEN IN THE DEFENSE OF HIS COLLEAGUES.

4. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT ACTION APPEARS TO BE OF DOUBTFUL LEGALITY. THE ACTION WAS BASED ON DECREE LAW 198 OF DECEMBER 29, 1973, WHICH ESTABLISHED TRANSITIONAL RULES FOR TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES.

IN THE EMBASSY'S RADING OF THE LAW, BOTH THE REMOVAL OF SANTANA AND HIS COLLEAGUES, AND THE NAMING OF THE EIGHT NEW MEMBERS WERE JUSTIFIED BY A SPECIOUS INTERPRETATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY. MOREOVER, THE GOC IN VARIOUS WAYS HAD RECOGNIZED THE SANTANA GROUP SINCE ITS SELECTION IN EARLY DECEMBER 1973; TO TURN THEM OUT NOW IS A PURELY POLITICAL DECISION. THE REMOVED LEADERS PRESUMABLY CAN TAKE THEIR CASE TO THE CIVIL COURTS, BUT COULD WELL LOSE ON NARROW LEGAL GROUNDS.

5. WE HAVE BEEN WONDERING WHEN AND HOW THE GORERNMENT WOULD BEGIN TO REACT TO THE CHALLENGE TO ITS LABOR POLICIES POSED BY THE "DINAMICOS." THE PROCEDURE USED TO UNSEAT THE CTC DIRECTORS COULD BE APPLIED AGAINST SOME OF THE OTHER "DINAMICO" UNIONS. THE GOC IS DOUBTLESS AWARE THAT PUNITIVE ACTION AGAINST THE "DINAMICOS" WILL ALIENATE THE AFL-CIO AND FREE LABOR ORGANIZATIONS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD. BUT THE JUNTA MAY FEEL THAT BY TAKING PIECEMEAL ACTION AGAINST ITS LABOR CRITICS ONE BY ONE, IT CAN HOLD THE OUTSIDE REACTION TO MANAGEABLE LEVELS AND GRADUALLY CONSOLIDATE FULL CONTROL OVER THE CHILEAN TRADE UNIONS.
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